DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 555 PS 017 101

AUTHOR Asprea, Anna Maria; And Others
TITLE The Conceptualization of War in Children.
PUB DATE Jul 87
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (9th, Tokyo, Japan, July 12-16, 1987). Figures contain light, broken print.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Childhood Attitudes; Foreign Countries; Nuclear Warfare; Peace; Preadolescents; *Social Attitudes; *Social Cognition; *War
IDENTIFIERS Italy

ABSTRACT

Three procedures were used to elicit information from children 9-10 and 13-14 years old on their conceptions of war: (1) children were asked to give at least 10 answers to the question, "What is war?"; (2) each child was interviewed individually; and (3) children were asked to respond to magazine pictures of war scenes. The detailed and complex responses showed that children were aware of the consequences of war on both a personal and a collective level, and that they had conflicting feelings regarding the concept of war. (PCB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED290555

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF WAR IN CHILDREN

by

A.M. Asprea M. SBANDI G.Villone-Betocchi

Department of Relation and Communication Sciences
University of Naples
Via Porta di Massa, 1 - 80133 Napoli Italia

Political socialization has become, in the latest twenty years, a topic to be studied with growing attention; and much research has been carried out in different countries in order to highlight the opinions and the attitudes of children and young people toward institutions and national, as well as international , problems, being the process which underlies political socialization the product of a multifacets personal evolution in the context of ecological factors.

Being these years of our life the time of nuclear power, it is to be understood that the literature has focussed much attention on the way very young and young people conceptualize and represent peace and war. The Journal of Peace Research was published first in 1960, and the contributions of Alvik, Tolley , as well as of others AA. , have stressed an important datum concerning the lack of "active peace" conceptualization. That is to say that young people mostly give to "peace" the meaning of "lack of war", thus giving evidence of a missing "step" in the process of socialization, which can be imputed to the social environment these young people belong to. In other words, the social-ecological environment is poorly stimulating the conceptualization and the formation processes of opinions and attitudes toward peace.

As a matter of fact young people have a better knowledge of war than of peace; they have a more detailed terminology for the word "war", and they give evidence of more complex and interconnected opinions and attitudes toward the subject of war. The lack of terminology for the word "peace" is to be related to the lack of information, and to the lack of educational formation in terms of justice and human dignity (Wahlstrom, 1986). Therefore, the majority of AA. agrees in emphasizing the need for a "peace-oriented" education, and in encouraging an appropriate way of teaching history in the schools and of facing adults' ideological perspectives and political beliefs (Haavelsrud, 1972).

Yet it is to be stressed also that in recent years we are facing a change. In the States, a group of young people has organized in 1981 the "Children's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament " which is now an international association including in its structure a variety of countries. Also in USSR young people are aware of the nuclear threat and of its catastrophic consequences. A group of young people interviewed in 1986 maintained that political leaders and international institutions

PS 017101

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
AnnaMaria Asprea
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

(such as the North Atlantic Organization) should be strongly involved in the battle against nuclear threat , and who believed that their own contribution might be of great help for achieving the goals of peace.

It is , thus , to be understood how being the psychologist mostly interested in human behaviour, he cannot but devote much attention to the study of interpersonal relations and environmental factors which may encourage a peaceful condition. We well know how aggressive drive may result in destructive choice behaviour, and we also know how it is possible to outline at least three main conditions which can, at different levels, facilitate or hamper peace. These conditions are:

- the possibility if projecting our negative impulses on a real enemy;
- the excessive stressing of national feelings which may be interpreted as "group narcissism ";
- the conceptualization of such enemy as a source of danger and of threat.

According to Wahlstrom, an effective education should aim both to reduce the nationalistic impulses and to encourage, especially in young people a better knowledge of others. This formation process would fit a program of education for peace; in fact it is well known in dynamic psychology how the formation of positive interelation nets may prevent destructive interrelation processes.

The interest of the literature for the attitudes of young people toward such object as war and peace is related not only to the struggle for survival, but also to the cognitive need of better understanding such constructs as war, peace, freedom, justice, etc. along sex and age variables, and according to the source of information. The research in this field is cognitively oriented , and the most recent contributions of the literature take into account the concept of social representation as studied by Moscovici. For this Author , social representations are cognitive systems with their own specific language and logic; they are not mere opinions about , or attitudes toward something, but they are considered as peculiar "theories" meant to "discover" and to "organize" the reality.

It is worth here to emphasize that young people "discover" the political world and its problems, little by little, and they show a different interest toward it according to sx and age variables. But also other factors play a main role in such "discovery" . Falk and Selg (1982), for instance, maintain that young people's opinions and attitudes in this field, are influenced by the way significant adults, political events. More so , Escalona (1982), points out that deep affective reactions of adults to some specific problems, such as the nuclear threat, affect the way of "living" these events on the part of the children.

THE RESEARCH

Our research belongs to the theoretical field of the social representations and it focusses on the concept of "image" as conceptualized by the recent work of D. Jodelet (1984).

Subjects and procedures

Our study has taken into account n. 120 young people divided into two groups according to age and scholarity (1st. group including children 9-10 years old; 2nd group including teenagers 13-14 years old).

Subjects were drawn at random out of the lists of the students of two schools and they all belong to the high middle class.

Procedure

The procedure of the experiment has taken into account two different stages, with one week interval.

1st. Stage

The young people have been divided into groups of 15 subjects each, and each group has been asked to give at least 10 answers to the question "what is war?". The aim of this technique has been that of forwarding a better opportunity for the free expression of the associations with the "stimulus word".

2nd. Stage

In the second stage, a halfstructured interview has been administered to the children individually. The interview was formed of eleven multiple choice questions and of nine open questions . Projective stimula have been administered according to a casual order of presentation; these stimula consisted of enlarged xero-copies of magazine pictures, chosen by a group of 60 subjects. The order of presentation of the questionnaire and of the projective technique has been randomised.

Data analysis

Data have undergone statistical analysis. It is to be stressed that each sentence has been considered as a single unit of analysis, and that each category has been classified only once in each protocol. The categories have been defined by two psychologists non involved in the research , through the examination of 20 protocols per technique and 10 protocols per sex.

Through the answers to the question "what is war?" , we have obtained a list of 20 categories. Trhough the answers to the questionnaire, a list of 33; and through the answers to the projective technique a list of 15.

The data which thus have been collected have undergone:
a) factor analysis; b) similarity analysis.

FACTOR ANALYSIS - Question : "What is war ?"

Within the categories related to this question, we take into account the first four factors which explain the 75% of the total variance of the studied phenomenon:

Factor 1 - War is"destruction "

This first factor is bipolar and there are opposite variables such as: "loss of personal belongings" - "death of dear ones" and: "poverty/unemployemnt"- "total nuclear destruction". We want to emphasize that in the "image" of a destructive war there are features of individual,as well as collective, losses. The war is viewed as a "threat" not only to the more personal struggle for survival and welfare (work, affective links, home, etc.) , but also to the welfare and the survival of the people in the world. It is of some interest, given the age of our subjects, to point out that the "collective losses" are those which saturate more the factor.

Factor 2- War is "conflict"

This factor is saturated by four variables in the following order: "conflict among countries", "revolt", "political supremacy", "religious supremacy". The factor stresses the "hazard" aspects of the war and it underlines its interpretation in terms of political and religious power.

Factor 3 - War is "hate"

This factor represents the sadness connected with the war. It gives evidence of some negative affective cues about the feelings of war as "oppression", "hate" and "anxiety". These last variables stress the climate of "oppression" and of "hate and anxiety" feelings, as they are brought about in wartime.

Factor 4 - War is "desolation"

The feelings of despair in wartime are reflected in this factor. Such feelings are strictly connected with the death of the dear ones, but also with the collective consequences of the destruction in the countries.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Within the categories related to the questionnaire we will take here into account 5 factors which explain the 78% of the total variance.

Factor 1 - War as a bipolar reality

Through this factor it is possible to observe an interesting contrast between the confidence in the possibility of avoiding the war, thanks to diplomacy tacts, and the belief that the war is an event which cannot be avoided. Such belief has to be related to the interest that young people have in games, movies and literature about war. We may hypothesize that in our study the young people give evidence of

their ambivalent feelings for an event which is in some way eliciting imitation and attraction owing to the socialization process and to the introjection of a reality which is considered always present.

Factor 2 - War as an "incumbent reality"

The "everywhere" presence of the war which is represented in this second factor may be interpreted as a consequence of mass media and of verbal messages which aim to consider the war as an "antique" reality in the history of the countries.

Factor 3 - War as "independence"

This factor includes traits of "independence", "conquest" and "fight for winning". This datum is giving evidence that our subjects associate "independence war" with images of victory.

Factor 4 - War is "madness"

The irrationality and the "nuclear madness" of the war is strongly represented in this factor.

Factor 5 - War is "male"

According to this factor , proneness to war is to be connected with "men" and, namely, with "old and powerful" men.

PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUE

Factorial analysis

Within the categories obtained through the content analysis of the protocols gathered with the projective technique we will here take into account the first two factors which cover the 62% of the total variance.

Factor 1 - War is "threat"

This factor takes into account the following variables; "processes", "deported people", "prisoners","wounded people". The factor contributes to the completing of the image of destruction as given by the answers to the question about war ("what is war ?") , and it gives evidence of more "static" elements, such as "destroyed countries", "loss of dear ones", etc.

Factor 2 - War is "action"

In this factor there is the contrast of variables such as "secret mission", "adventure" , "enthusiasm" , "victory" and : "explosion","escape", "help". It is possible to see here the positive features of the war, for instance , the image of enthusiasm in the participants, together with the action of organizing secret missions. Yet, it is also possible to observe other sorts of "action " images characterized by negative features such as "escape", "esplosion", "help".

It is ,in our opinion, of some interest to stress how these children have had the chance of expressing the dynamic aspects of the "war image". And it may be hypo-

thesized that through the dynamic elements the subjects have also expressed a positive identification.

SIMILARITY ANALYSIS

Through the analysis of similarities, it is possible to know"which is related to which ", being, indeed, two thematic units considered similar when they appear together within the discussion about a given object. In our specific situation this object being the "war".

In order to find out the "strength of similarity" among categories, we have applied the "phi of contingency".

Therefore we have obtained the following matrixes:

- Question : "What is war ?" 20 categories - a matrix with 122 similarity values (one for each couple of elements).
- Questionnaire 32 categories, 219 similarity values.
- Projective technique 15 categories 77 similarity values.

Three similarity "trees" have been formed with the mentioned values. (As it is known ,the "tree " is a particular kind of graph in which each apex is connected with the other through an arch , and in which only one path is possible between two apexes (Degenne, Vergés , 1973).Each apex represents a category and each arch represents a relation of similarity between two apex-categories. The maximum tree is the one,among all the possible trees derived from one graph , in which the addition of similarity values related to the branches is the highest. Therefore in the maximum tree there are only the connections with might close the paths being excluded. Thus the maximum tree is the barest representation of similarities which keeps the connections with the highest values, and it forwards a graphic representation of the considered traits, on the basis of their proximity .).

Similarity analysis - "What is war ? "

Looking at the first graph which has been obtained through the analysis of the similarity values among the categories of answers to the question :"What is war ?", we may note that the elements which are more connected are : "conflict", "overwhelming" and "power". The "conflict" element is located in the centrum of a connection-net, and it can be considered as a rather central element of the representation of war in the studied children. Images of "death", "feelings of hate", "struggle for power" are connected with the "conflict" element. The "power" trait is, on its part, connected both with the "religious " and the "political supremacy", and, consequently, with the similarity values of a lesser strength , such as the possibility of a "nuclear war". This element is, on its part, connected with "madness", "lack of morality (amorality)", and with the "uselessness of war".

Looking at these data we may hypothesize that our children have not only grasped the lack of moral principles implied in the war, but they have also got the feeling of

the total uselessness of an event which hampers any survival.

The "conflict" element is connected with the "overwhelming" element, which is, on its part , connected with "anxiety", as it has already been pointed out through the factorial analysis. Here we may find again the elements of the individual and the collective losses; the first being referred to the "death of dear ones" and the "loss of personal belongingness"; the second being related to the "destroyed countries".

It is very interesting, in our opinion, that the "destruction of civilization" is directly connected with the "overwhelming"element, since "destruction of civilization" is something more than "destruction of a country",being civilization the opportunity that countries have to keep and to enlarge their specific values , and being such values, on the other hand, hampered by "overwhelming".

To epitomize: the analysis of the field structure of the social representation of war seems to be characterized by two traits. One trait is connected with the motivations and the consequences related to war; "conflict", "power", "supremacy", "over whelming" may all result both in"death and nuclear destruction",and in"civilization destruction". The other trait is related to the individual losses, and to the feelings of anxiety.

Similarity analysis - Questionnaire

The second "tree" (graph) is related to the contents of the questionnaire. The main element is the attribution of the will of "war" to "men" and,mainly,to "powerful/ old men". When the salience of the "male" factor is connected with the "young" factor it is possible to find plans for "conquest" and "war games-like" interests. These sorts of interests may be found both in the role of war organizers,and of gregarious, and they are connected with the interest for war literature.

The "male" characterization of war is connected with the irrationality and the atomic "madness", and it is also to be related to the consideration that war is inevitable. This last element is confirmed by the perception of war as an old "institution" in the life of the countries..

The element "conflict" is related to the "oppression"/"persecution" element ,which is, on its part, connected with the possibility of rescue thanks to elements such as "independence war", "struggle for winning" . The "persecution" element is also related to the interest for war movies. We might wonder about this datum; yet an explanation may be forwarded in terms of removal of the emotional distress connected with the "oppression", through the dramatizing effect.

We would like to stress here that when the war is considered as an old institution ("It has always been there"),it is possible to understand its characteristics of "being everywhere"; yet all this is connected also with a rejection of the war literature, movies and games, and we may hypothesize that the reaction to mass media influence may bring an explanation for this rejection-effect.

Finally, it is to be stressed that when the element "war as an old institution" is connected with women we find a very poor interest for war games and for war literature, together with the mentioning of diplomatic contacts as a way for avoiding war.

Similarity analysis - Projective technique

The data collected through the projective technique are characterized , as we have already pointed out in reporting the factorial analysis, by dynamic traits. We may consider as "strong",elements such as "explosion", "battle", "attack", "secret mission ". The battle is the core around which the explosions and the attacks,as more detailed aspects of war, are gathered. More personal elements, such as the enemy and the prisoners , are related to the battle.

It is to be emphasized here that it is the first time that the element "enemy" is being found in analysis of data, though it is without any qualification. Feelings of enthusi-asm are connected with the "attack" element, together with "helping" acts and "retreat" movements which are, on their part, related to a negative perception of the event and which are also person-directed.

"Attack" is connected also with "possible attacks" and with "space wars". Such datum gives an hint of a more general view of war, far from the experience - indirect though it may be - of young people. The element "nuclear madness" is giving evidence of the "nuclear threat", and it is to be considered as a constant element in the field of war representation, no matter which technique has been employed to investigate.

DISCUSSION

The image of war that has been given to us by the children we have studied is complex and nicely detailed. It is an "old reality" in the history of the countries; it is connected with conflicts, power and overwhelming; it is brought out in attacks, battles, secret missions. Males (old and powerful) are mostly connected with war; when war is connected with irrationality and madness, while, when young people are connected with war, war is connected with an "heroic" feeling of adventures and conquest.

We want to stress here that the element "enemy" has a very poor strength and it is never characterized . Another interesting datum, in our opinion, is that our subjects grasp the obnoxious consequences of war, both at a personal and a collective level, being war connected with loss of welfare, and the death of dear ones , on one hand, and with the destruction of countries and of civilization, on the other.

Further, a typical image of total destruction is related to the nuclear war, which is judged as "mad", useless", "amoral".

Yet we have to observe that the war elicits conflicting feelings:on one hand it is related to hate, to anxiety; on the other hand, it is related to enthusiasm, to adventures , to victory. Such a bipolarity may bring an explanation for contrasting attitudes of rejection /interest toward war-like activities, such as reading war literature, watching war movies, playing war games. It is worth to be stressed at this point that the boys of the study give evidence of more attraction than rejection, and that it seems that they find in the "playing" activities related to war a way for identifying with the heroes and for dramatizing the actions. An explanation of this datum in terms of political socialization and of mass media influence may be forwarded, yet we have

also to keep in mind that this stimulating datum may be explained too in terms of "immature" need and way of canalizing the inner conflicts.

References :

Alvik T. (1968) , The development of views on conflict "war and peace" among school children: a Norvegian case study. Journal of Peace Research , 2,2, 171-195.

Degenne A., Vergés C. (1973) , Introduction à l'analyse des similitudes. Revue Françcaise de Sociologie, 14, 471-515.

Escalona S.K. (1982) , Growing up with the threat of nuclear war: some indirect effects on personality development. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 52, 4, 600-607.

Falk A., Selg H. (1982), Die begriffe Krieg und Frieden in der Vorstellung von Kinderen und Jugendlichen. Psychologie in Erziehung und Unterrischt, 29, 353-358.

Haavelsrud M. (1972), Anzichten von Kinderen und Jugenlichen uber Krieg un Frieden. Bildung Erziehung, 22,3, 29-43.

Jodelet D. (1984) , Representation sociale: phenomenes, concept, et theorie. In Moscovici S., (Ed.) Psychologie Sociale, PUF , Paris.

Moscovici S., (1984) The phenomenon of social representation In: R.Farr and S. Moscovici (Eds.) , Social Representations , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Tolley H.jr. (1973), Children and war: political socialization to international conflict. Teachers'College Press, Columbia University press, new York.

Wahlstrom R. (1986), (It. trans.) Sulle premesse psicologiche dell'educazione alla pace. Psicologia Contemporanea , 76, 42-45.

Appendix 1 - Analysis along age variable

"Power " . Power is considered by young people as responsible for war.
(X^2 8 d.f. 1 p 0.01)

" The war cannot be avoided" , This factor is more represented in the second group young people.
(X^2 15 d.f. 2 p 0.001)

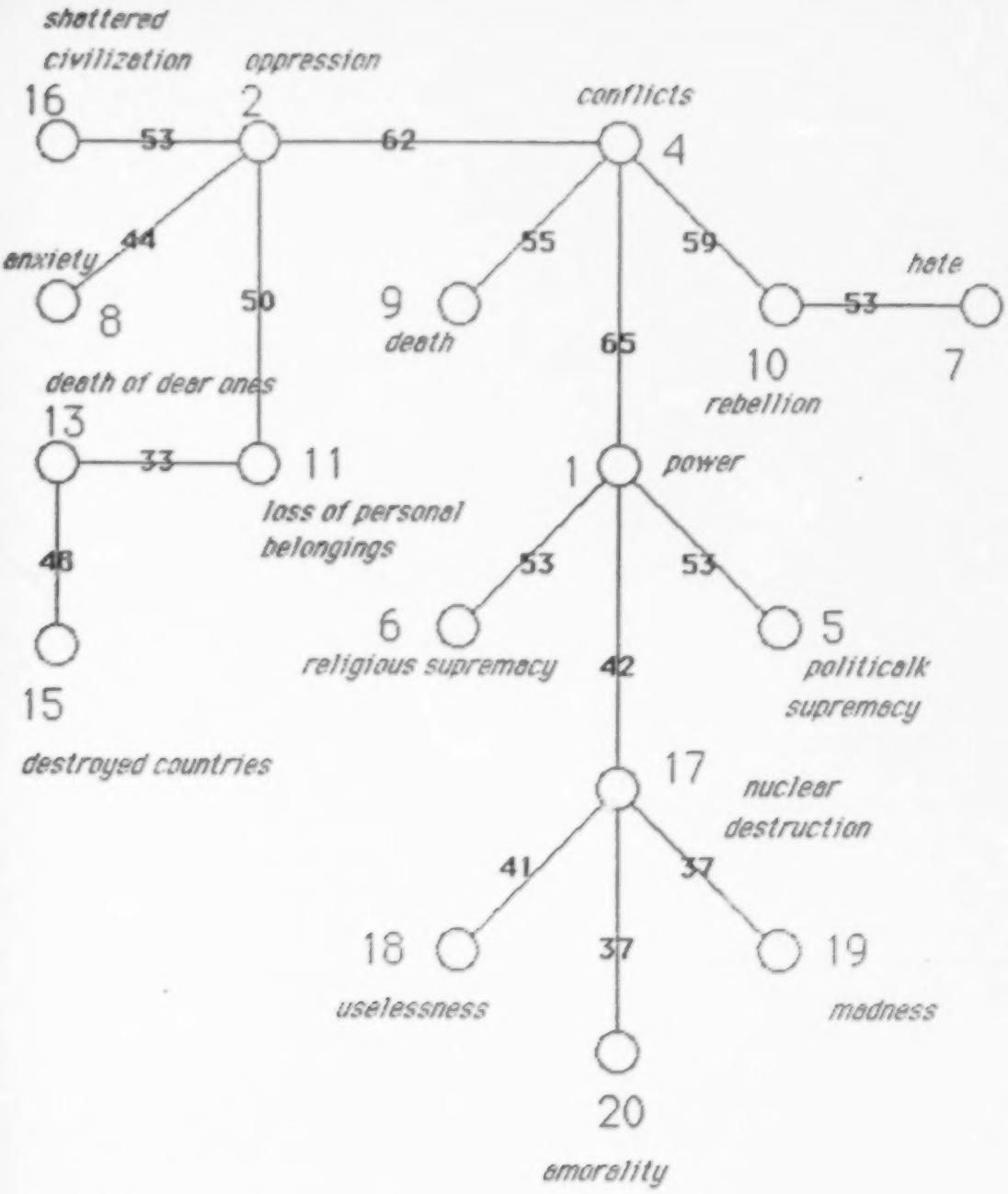
" Diplomacy acts " . The possibility of avoiding war through diplomacy tects is forwarded by younger children.
(X^2 31 d.f. 2 p 0.001)

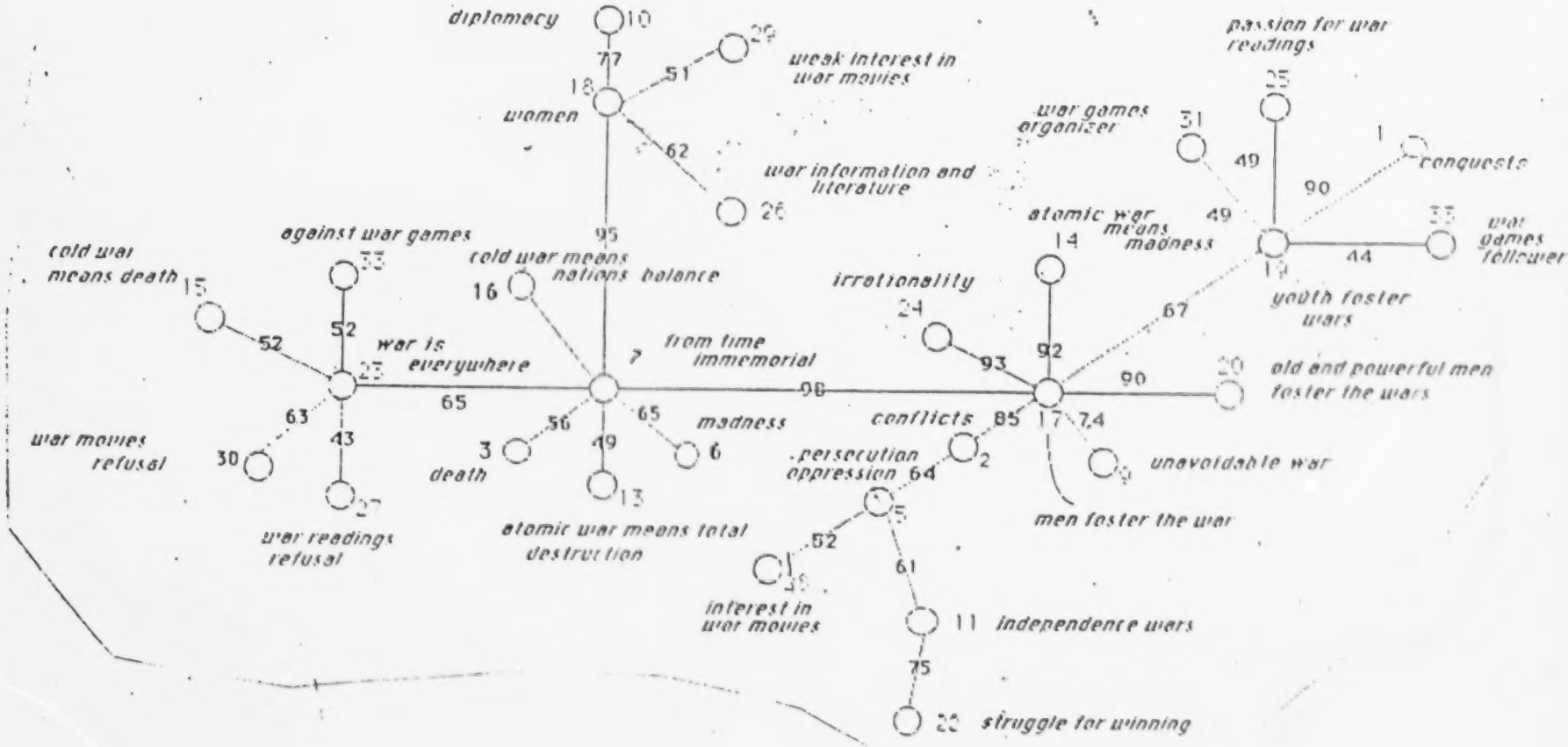
"Loss of personal belongings". War is connected with this sort of loss for younger children.
(X^2 30 d.f. 2 p. 0.001)

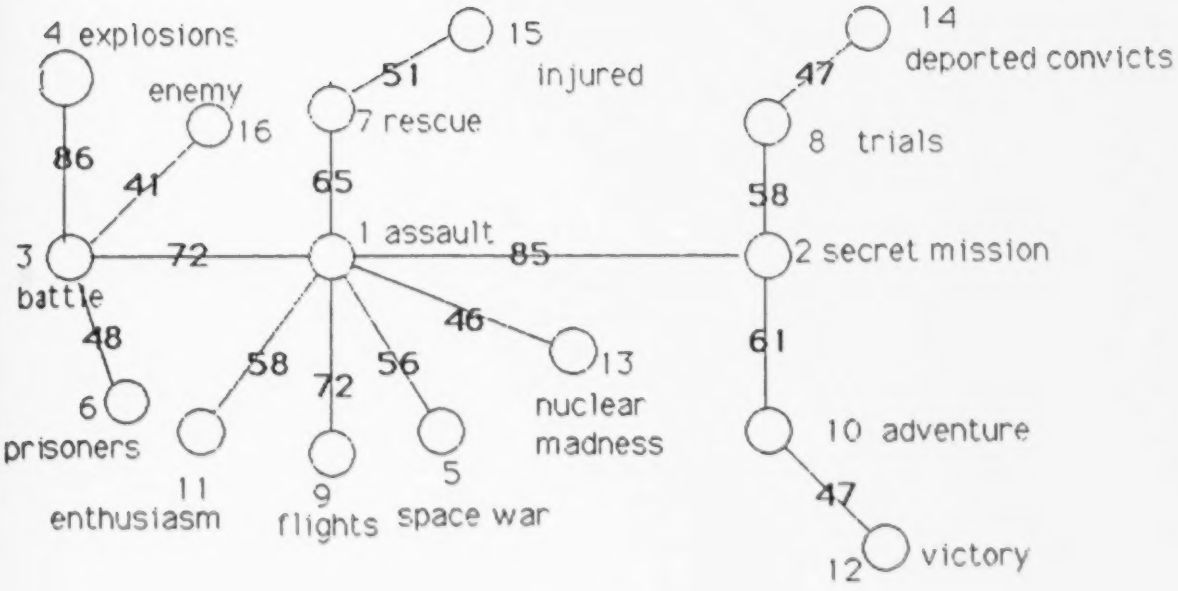
"War as a political conflict". This factog is more represented in the second group of young people.
(X^2 13.32 d.f. 1.2 p 0.001°

" Collective losses , destroyed countries ". This factor is more represented among older subjects.
(X^2 13.32 d.f. 2 p 0.001)

"Amorality" . Younger children point out this factor more than the older ones.
(X^2 17 d.f. 2 p 0.002)


shattered civilization
16
oppression
2
conflicts
4
53
62
44
anxiety
8
50
55
9
death
59
hate
53
10
rebellion
7
65
death of dear ones
13
33
11
loss of personal belongings
1
power
48
53
53
6
religious supremacy
5
politicalk supremacy
42
15
destroyed countries
17
nuclear destruction
41
37
18
uselessness
37
19
madness
20
amorality


diplomacy
10
77
18
women
51
29
weak interest in war movies
62
war information and literature
26
95
against war games
33
cold war means death
15
52
52
war is everywhere
28
cold war means nations balance
16
from time immemorial
65
98
63
43
30
27
war movies refusal
war readings refusal
3
death
56
49
65
6
madness
13
atomic war means total destruction
passion for war readings
25
war games organizer
31
49
1
conquests
90
49
33
war games follower
atomic war means madness
14
irrationality
24
93
92
67
19
youth foster wars
90
20
old and powerful men foster the wars
conflicts
85
17
74
unavoidable war
persecution oppression
64
2
5
men foster the war
52
61
interest in war movies
11
independence wars
75
22
struggle for winning


4 explosions
enemy
16
15
injured
51
7 rescue
14
deported convicts
47
8 trials
86
41
65
58
3
battle
72
1 assault
85
2 secret mission
48
46
61
6
prisoners
58
72
56
13
nuclear
madness
10 adventure
11
enthusiasm
9
flights
5
space war
47
12
victory